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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/86 on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues. On 20 May 2016, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to all Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions contained in resolutions 70/83 to 70/86 and requesting information by 11 July 2016 concerning any action taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation. Replies were received from Bulgaria, Ecuador, Finland, Israel, Japan, Jordan and Sweden, with regard to the requests contained in paragraph 4 of Assembly resolution 70/83, paragraph 4 of Assembly resolution 70/84, paragraphs 28 to 30 of Assembly resolution 70/85 and paragraph 4 of Assembly resolution 70/86.

* A/71/150.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 70/86 on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues.

2. On 20 May 2016, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions contained in resolutions 70/83 to 70/86, and requesting information by 11 July 2016 on any actions taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation.

II. Replies received

Bulgaria

[15 July 2016]

Bulgaria has the honour to communicate that the process of adopting a decision of the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria for providing a voluntary contribution to UNRWA of 50,000 euros is near its completion. Bulgaria has been financially supporting UNRWA on an annual basis since 2012.

Ecuador

[7 July 2016]

The Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations has the honour to advise of the payment of $5,000 as a voluntary contribution to UNRWA for 2014.

Finland

[1 July 2016]

The Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations would like to inform the Secretary-General of the following action that his Government has taken, and envisages taking, to implement the provisions contained in the resolutions of the seventieth session of the General Assembly pertaining to aid and assistance to Palestine refugees and contributions to the operations of UNRWA.

Finland has heeded the imperative to ensure sustained and predictable financial support for the operations of the Agency and has committed to providing multi-annual financing in the period 2015-2018, in order to contribute to the uninterrupted delivery of its vital services. In addition, Finland has committed to timely disbursement early in the year, and directs its multi-annual contribution to the regular budget of the Agency. In 2015, Finland responded to increased expenditures arising from the conflict and instability by contributing to the emergency appeal for the Gaza Strip.

Israel

[15 August 2016]

Notwithstanding Israel's ongoing support for the humanitarian activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), it decided to vote against resolutions 70/83 to 70/86. Israel remains concerned by the political motivation behind the aforesaid resolutions and is disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided view that fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

As a consequence of the political nature of these resolutions, UNRWA has taken it upon itself to promote the Palestinian narrative and to use humanitarian funding for the purpose of advocacy. There is no shortage of advocacy organizations for the Palestinian cause and Israel strongly objects to this blatant misuse by UNRWA of the funds the international community donates for the welfare of Palestinian refugees.

Israel supports a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions and a removal of all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with the concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian people.

In this respect, Israel strongly supports the application of the standard principles that guide the United Nations with respect to the treatment of refugees elsewhere, to the Palestinian situation. Specifically, the mandate of UNRWA should be consistent with the standard United Nations policy on refugees. Furthermore, the mandate of UNRWA should include the active promotion of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees in the Palestinian context.

While other refugee populations not under the mandate of UNRWA have seen a gradual decrease in their numbers commensurate with their rehabilitation into civilian life, the Palestinian refugee population is growing at an exponential rate (from 700,000 in 1949 to 4.2 million in 2005, to 5.2 million in 2015, and is expected to reach 6.2 million in 2020). It seems that UNRWA, as an organization, does not aspire to create a solution to the refugee problem and rehabilitate the refugees, but rather merely to "freeze" and perpetuate their current status. The politically motivated nature of resolutions 70/83 to 70/86 only reinforces this agenda.

Palestinian refugees (now into their fourth generation) are reliant on international aid and funds for their health, education and livelihood. The aspiration to maintain the political issue at the expense of the humanitarian needs of the refugees, as reflected in the resolutions, is also evident from the realities on the ground. A clear example of that is the fact that the Palestinian Authority refuses to take responsibility for providing services to the refugee population in areas under its complete control, insisting upon UNRWA "exclusivity" in that respect.

Despite an ongoing and acute threat to its security, Israel has gone to great lengths to foster conditions for Palestinian economic development and

cooperation, approving a substantial number of UNRWA projects and facilitating UNRWA humanitarian assistance to its Palestinian beneficiaries.

Furthermore, despite these acute security threats, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. Israel has intensified its cooperation with the international community and with the Palestinian Authority to facilitate sustainable infrastructural and economic development in Gaza, in order to meet both the short-term and long-term needs of the civilian population. Since October 2014, over 5 million tons of building material have been transferred to Gaza, including 872,000 tons of cement and 157,000 tons of iron.

Of the 130,000 homes that were partially damaged during Operation Protective Edge and approved for repair, repairs have already been completed on over 80,000 homes, and repairs to more than 20,000 are under way.

The second stage of Gaza's reconstruction has begun, with almost 13,000 residential units authorized for complete reconstruction, and for over 2,500 of them, all the necessary building materials to start work have already been purchased. In addition, 790 public projects such as roads, schools, clinics and mosques have been approved — 124 of them have already been completed.

As part of the humanitarian effort, and parallel to the increase of the crossings of commercial goods, there was an increase in the number of people crossing at the Erez crossing in 2015. There were over 360,000 crossings into Israel, including patients going for treatment, students, worshippers going for Friday prayers on Temple Mount, persons visiting family members in prison and businessmen with daily permits, the latter number of whom had increased to 5,000 during the course of the year. All this is taking place while the Egyptian Rafah crossing is closed during most of the year, owing to the Palestinian Authority's continuous refusal to assume its responsibilities.

Israel has taken these measures, and many more, despite the major security risks they pose. Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization, has diverted massive amounts of aid and imported goods for use in its terrorist infrastructure. For instance, building materials worth tens of millions of United States dollars were diverted by Hamas for the construction of cross-border tunnels, which were used to attack Israel during the summer conflict of 2014. Hamas continues to pursue its efforts to rearm, expand its rocket arsenal and construct its infrastructure in preparation for future attacks against Israel.

It is unacceptable that resources intended to better the lives of the residents of Gaza are being used instead for terror activities aimed at harming the citizens of Israel. Israel fully supports the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations and aid agencies and emphasizes the importance of ensuring that such activities are not being used and abused by terror organizations.

While Israel continues to assiduously assist the reconstruction of Gaza, these efforts are hindered by outside forces. Delays in reconstruction predominantly stem from the actions of Hamas, the de facto ruler of Gaza, and its conflict with the Palestinian Authority. For example, Hamas refuses to allow the Palestinian Authority to take security and civilian responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings with Israel and Egypt. For its part,

the Palestinian Authority wants to weaken the Hamas regime and this goal appears to be influencing the pace and extent of its reconstruction activities.

As indicated in the recent report of the Middle East Quartet, the continued control of the terrorist organization, Hamas, over Gaza is impeding the reconstruction of Gaza. It should be emphasized that any future Palestinian government must abide by the principles of the international Quartet: it must renounce violence, recognize Israel and abide by prior agreements. Palestinian incitement of terrorism must stop.

Japan

[1 August 2016]

Japan's contribution to UNRWA so far amounts to approximately $761 million, and the contribution in the fiscal year 2015 reached a record high of $45.6 million. In March, Japan disbursed $1.58 million to supplement the contribution of the fiscal year 2015, and disbursed $1.58 million as its voluntary contribution for the fiscal year 2016 in June. Japan's fiscal year starts in April and ends in March.

Jordan

[1 June 2016]

The Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations would like to inform the Secretariat of the efforts exerted by Jordan to keep the financial situation of UNRWA under review. In the framework of the support and the considerable efforts of host countries and donors to UNRWA, and following the Ministerial meeting that was held on 26 September 2015 in the margins of the high-level segment of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, Jordan and Sweden co-chaired a meeting on the theme "Strengthening the support of donors and hosts for the sustainability of UNRWA" on 4 May 2016. The meeting aimed at ensuring that core UNRWA programmes, notably in the fields of health and education, were fully funded so that services to Palestinian refugees would continue uninterrupted. The meeting mainly addressed the Agency's deficit in 2016 and the need to broaden the donor base, and called for enhanced financial engagement from traditional and non-traditional UNRWA donors. It also called upon all donors to explore the possibility of providing more multilateral and earmarked funding to the Agency.

Sweden

[15 June 2016]

The Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations would like to inform the Secretariat of the efforts exerted by Sweden to keep the financial situation of UNRWA under review. In the framework of the support and considerable efforts of donors and host countries to UNRWA, and following the Ministerial meeting that was held on 26 September 2015 in the margins of the high-level segment of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, Jordan and Sweden have co-chaired a meeting on the theme "Strengthening the support of

donors and hosts for the sustainability of UNRWA" on 4 May 2016. The meeting aimed at ensuring that core UNRWA programmes, notably in the fields of health and education, were fully funded so that services to Palestinian refugees would continue uninterrupted. The meeting mainly addressed the Agency's deficit in 2016 and the need to broaden the donor base, and called for enhanced financial engagement from traditional and non-traditional UNRWA donors. It also called upon all donors to explore the possibility of providing more multilateral and earmarked funding to the Agency.

In addition to the support it provided to UNRWA humanitarian appeals for Palestine and Syria, Sweden increased the non-earmarked support it provides to the General Fund by 15 per cent for 2016, reaching $40.6 million.